
**COMMUNITY SERVICES BLOCK
GRANT PROGRAM**

Information Memorandum

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Office of Community Services
Division of State Assistance
370 L'Enfant Promenade, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20447
<http://www.acf.gov/programs/ocs/csbq>

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TO: State Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Administrators; U.S. Territory Administrators; Administrators for CSBG-Eligible Entities; Members of Tripartite Boards for CSBG-Eligible Entities; State Community Action Agency (CAA) Associations; and National CSBG Training and Technical Assistance (T/TA) Providers

SUBJECT: Reorganization of CSBG T/TA Resources – A New Strategy for Excellence

PURPOSE: To share the Office of Community Services' (OCS) new strategic approach to achieve excellence in the CSBG T/TA program and related activities.

RELATED REFERENCES: Community Services Block Grant Act (Public Law 105-285, the Community Opportunities, Accountability, and Training and Educational Services Act of 1998)

This Information Memorandum (IM) provides background on the new strategy of the Office of Community Services (OCS) for the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Training and Technical Assistance (T/TA) Program during Fiscal Year (FY) 2011. A description of the FY 2011 strategic approach is provided outlining necessary considerations to more efficiently utilize and leverage the available CSBG T/TA resources. This IM also provides background on statutory requirements regarding how OCS will carry out its compliance and T/TA responsibilities for the CSBG program.

Note: This IM includes information that relates to the statutory requirements regarding the distribution of T/TA funds. Key sections of the CSBG Act are referenced throughout the IM. It is strongly recommended that the referenced sections of the CSBG Act be read along with this guidance in order to assure an understanding of the specific language of the statute. The CSBG Act may be obtained online at the following web address:

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ocs/csbq/pdf/csbq_law_508.pdf.

Background

The CSBG network consists of several types of organizations that administer and/or support services designed to eliminate the causes and conditions of poverty in the United States. These organizations include: 1) State CSBG Agencies that act as the lead agency for purposes of administering CSBG; 2) State Community Action Agency (CAA) Associations that provide T/TA to increase the capacity of local CSBG-eligible entities to carry out the mandate of the CSBG Act and measure results; 3) CSBG-eligible entities that create, coordinate and deliver programs and services to low-income communities; and 4) national CSBG partners that provide T/TA in the areas of data collection, legal issues, financial management, administrative governance, and performance measurement.

The historic CSBG T/TA infrastructure evolved over many years in response to a variety of administrative needs and program priorities. This T/TA infrastructure featured a wide range of grant activities and a large number of grantees nationwide. The approach has supported small

technical assistance projects (typically under \$75,000 per grant) administered by State CAA Associations in almost every State of the nation; crisis intervention activities that targeted a small number of local agencies; and specialized technical assistance projects that reflected the priorities of prior administrations (e.g., Healthy Marriage and Earned Income Tax Credit). Having such a diverse T/TA grant portfolio with a large number of small grants allowed customization at the State and local levels, but also created significant administrative and coordination challenges due to the large number of grantees, work plans, and organizational priorities.

While many States and communities have made effective use of CSBG T/TA support to improve and disseminate useful service approaches, OCS has identified a need for enhanced coordination of national technical assistance efforts and improved information on the results of technical assistance in terms of improved service delivery, targeting of resources based on local needs and outcomes, and risk mitigation to assure appropriate expenditure of funds.

Significant progress has already been made in strengthening national technical assistance efforts. For example, although the complexity of CSBG T/TA administrative activities was increased as a result of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), the ARRA funds also provided an opportunity to promote innovative practices and new evaluation activities which will form the basis for future improvements in CSBG. OCS supported exemplary practice work groups and supplemental projects at State CAA Associations, which are helping to identify and disseminate information on best practices in areas such as job creation, community economic development, benefits enrollment coordination, and asset development. Using the achievements of the CSBG network under ARRA as a foundation for future work, OCS believes that the future T/TA efforts can be made more effective through enhanced communication structures, reduced duplication of effort, and improved coordination between national technical assistance providers, State CAA Associations, and local CSBG service providers.

Use and Distribution Requirements for CSBG T/TA Funds

The CSBG Act specifies use and distribution requirements for CSBG T/TA funds.

Use Requirements – The CSBG Act provides specific guidance on the amount of funds available for T/TA. Under Section 674(b)(2) the HHS Secretary is required to reserve not less than one and one half percent of appropriated CSBG funds for training, technical assistance, planning, evaluation, and performance measurement, to assist States in carrying out corrective action activities and monitoring (to correct programmatic deficiencies of eligible entities), and for reporting and data collection activities.

Distribution Requirements – The CSBG Act prescribes distribution requirements for T/TA funds. Under Section 674(b)(2)(A) and Section 678A(c)(2) of the CSBG Act, of the T/TA appropriation under Section 674(b)(2) of the CSBG Act, not less than half of the funds must be “distributed directly to eligible entities, or Statewide or local organizations or associations, with demonstrated expertise in providing training to individuals and organizations on methods of effectively addressing the needs of low-income families and communities.”

National Strategy for Excellence in CSBG T/TA Program

Over the past 30 years, the standards and expectations for management of Federal programs have changed significantly. This increased attention to accountability, transparency, and performance outcomes demands the most efficient and effective use of CSBG T/TA resources. OCS believes that the new strategy for excellence in the CSBG T/TA program requires a restructuring of the current technical assistance approach to focus on coordination of national technical assistance organizations with regional consortia of State technical assistance organizations. The goal is to create a structure that is more manageable, and that will promote improved and more efficient coordination among our national technical assistance providers and the State CAA Associations through a regional approach based on the 10 service regions of the Administration for Children and Families’ (ACF).

In order to more efficiently utilize and leverage the available CSBG T/TA resources, OCS has developed a new strategic approach to streamlining the CSBG T/TA resources that will encourage interoperability among the T/TA grant recipients. OCS will implement a national strategic approach that includes a focus on the following four priority areas:

- 1. Performance Management and Data** – OCS will work with national technical assistance partners and State CSBG lead agencies to build upon the performance management structure developed through the Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) system and the current National Performance Indicators (NPI) that are used to assess program performance.
- 2. Governance and Legal Technical Assistance** – OCS will coordinate ongoing assistance to States and local entities to plan for routine governance and legal compliance issues faced by the majority of CSBG-eligible entities. For example, ongoing technical assistance will focus on board governance, human resource planning, and financial management standards necessary for high quality program administration in CSBG-eligible entities.
- 3. Risk Mitigation and Quality Assurance** – OCS will continue to focus significant attention on assessing and mitigating risks within CSBG, primarily focused on local entities with significant performance deficiencies, such as significant audit issues, lack of corrective action based on audit findings and State monitoring findings, Board compliance issues, failure to submit appropriate performance information, lack of documentation for services delivered, or other significant management concerns. The goal of OCS efforts will be to assist States in identifying agencies with the most significant performance issues and assuring appropriate corrective actions.
- 4. Centers of Excellence** – OCS will support national Centers of Excellence focused on identifying and disseminating exemplary practice models for specific service areas. For example, OCS currently supports a national technical assistance project focused on community economic development. The goal of CSBG Centers of Excellence will be to support a focus on evidence-based services to support reduction of poverty, revitalization of low-income communities, and empowerment of low-income families and individuals to become fully self-sufficient.

This national approach will begin with current national grantees for data collection, risk mitigation, performance management, governance, legal technical assistance, and community economic development. In addition, for FY 2011, OCS plans to support one new Center of Excellence focused on leadership development. The Leadership Development Center of Excellence (LDCE) will serve as a national Center of Excellence for high-quality and relevant leadership development T/TA information and resources, and develop a recommended approach for talent management within CSBG-eligible entities. These efforts are designed to ensure that CSBG-eligible entities are prepared for transition into the next decade with the strongest talent available. This new effort will focus on developing program leaders with the appropriate range of skills (e.g., public administration, strategic planning, succession planning, financial management, human resource development, community relations, cultural competence, and performance evaluation) necessary for management of complex non-profit and public entities according to the high standards necessary for oversight of public funds. Key elements of the LDCE will include: 1) toolkits and resource guides for succession planning; 2) workshops and webinars for human resource development planning; and 3) support for State and regionally based leadership development programs conducted through State CAA Associations and regional consortia.

CSBG Regional Performance and Innovation Consortia

OCS will establish 10 Regional Performance and Innovation Consortia (RPIs) that support an enhanced State, regional, and national T/TA strategy for the coordination, collaboration, and innovation in the CSBG program. The RPIs will serve as regional focal points to lead the development of a comprehensive and integrated system of T/TA capacity-building activities with core functions of T/TA coordination and information dissemination. The geographic locations of RPIs will be consistent with the 10 ACF Regions. The ACF Region Map may be obtained online at the following web address: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/oro/regions/acf_regions.html.

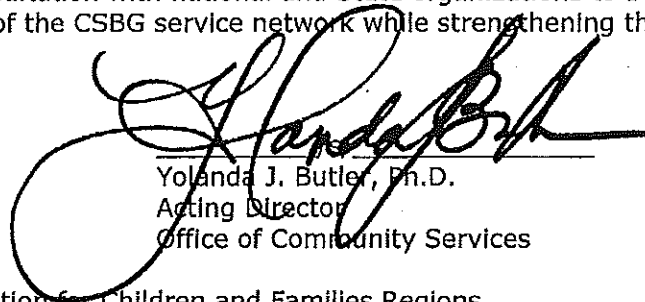
RPIs will coordinate activities designed to strengthen the ability of State CAA Associations to leverage resources; promote and sustain relationships between State CAA Associations and the corresponding State CSBG Lead Agencies; and increase the capacity of State CAA Associations to address the broad T/TA needs of CSBG-eligible entities. The RPI Consortia grantees are expected to include direct funding support for State CAA Associations in each region as well as regionally based coordination efforts. RPIs will work in partnership with OCS and established national technical assistance centers focused on performance management, governance, legal compliance, and risk mitigation and quality improvement. In addition, the RPIs will support promotion of innovative practices through collaboration with national CSBG Centers of Excellence focused on areas such as community economic development and leadership development in the CSBG network.

National technical assistance providers, including new Centers of Excellence, will be required to collaborate with the regional consortia (i.e., RPIs) of State CAA Associations and with other national technical assistance providers to assist in the design of regionally focused leadership recruitment, talent retention, and leadership development programs to meet the needs of CSBG-eligible entities in each ACF geographic region. This approach will help in tailoring leadership development efforts to differing job markets and economic situations in each region, and help extend the impact of the center of excellence.

Conclusion

ACF has established as its goal to work as seamlessly as possible across programs and with other Federal partners, States, Tribes, and grantees to eliminate unnecessary service barriers and enhance efforts to serve individuals, families and communities in an integrated manner. In support of ACF, the Office of Community Services' (OCS) new strategy for excellence in the CSBG T/TA program accounts for necessary considerations to more efficiently utilize and leverage the available T/TA resources. However, OCS will ensure that the new strategic approach continues to adhere to the use and distribution requirements of CSBG T/TA funds through the direct support of CSBG-eligible entities and local or statewide organizations or associations.

The Office of Community Services (OCS) appreciates the extraordinary efforts the CSBG network has made to address the needs of individuals, families and communities affected by the nation's economic crisis. While the restructuring of the CSBG T/TA program will present significant challenges, OCS will seek consultation with national and State organizations to build upon and sustain the current strengths of the CSBG service network while strengthening the foundation for future service improvements.



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Attachment: List of Administration for Children and Families Regions

ATTACHMENT List of Administration for Children and Families Regions

Regions	States	Territories	Regional Offices
I	Connecticut Maine Massachusetts New Hampshire Rhode Island Vermont		Boston
II	New York New Jersey	Puerto Rico Virgin Islands	New York City
III	Delaware District of Columbia Maryland Pennsylvania Virginia West Virginia		Philadelphia
IV	Alabama Florida Georgia Kentucky Mississippi North Carolina South Carolina Tennessee		Atlanta
V	Illinois Indiana Michigan Minnesota Ohio Wisconsin		Chicago
VI	Arkansas Louisiana New Mexico Oklahoma Texas		Dallas
VII	Iowa Kansas Missouri Nebraska		Kansas City
VIII	Colorado Montana North Dakota South Dakota Utah Wyoming		Denver
IX	Arizona California Hawaii Nevada	American Samoa Guam Mariana Islands Marshall Island Micronesia Palau	San Francisco
X	Alaska Idaho Oregon Washington		Seattle